Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development Canada
Affaires autochtones et Développement du Nord Canada

Strategic Research
La recherche stratégique

The Community Well-Being Index

SUMMARY OF TRENDS IN INUIT COMMUNITIES, 1981-2011

Key Findings:

- The average Community Well-Being (CWB) scores for Inuit and non-Aboriginal communities increased slowly but steadily between 1981 and 2011.
- In 2011, the CWB gap between Inuit and non-Aboriginal communities was substantial and only a few points narrower than in 1981.
- Of the four CWB components, Inuit communities' largest improvements since 1981 were in the areas of education and especially income.
- The largest gap between Inuit and non-Aboriginal communities is in housing. That gap has not narrowed in recent years.

Introduction

The Community Well-Being (CWB) index is a method of measuring well-being at the community level. It combines data on income, education, housing, and labour force activity into well-being "scores" for most communities in Canada. Scores can range from a low of zero to a high of 100.

Since 2004, Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development Canada has used the CWB index to track socioeconomic conditions in First Nations, Inuit, and non-Aboriginal communities. This research brief reviews trends in First Nations and non-Aboriginal community well-being over the 30-year period between 1981 and 2011.

Main Findings

National CWB Trends

The average CWB score for Inuit communities increased over the last 30 years, with the largest gains seen before 2001. There was a 12-point increase between 1981 and 1996, compared to a 3-point increase between 1996 and 2011 (Figure 1).

The CWB gap between Inuit and non-Aboriginal communities is substantial. In 2011, the average CWB score for Inuit communities was 16 points lower than the average score for non-Aboriginal communities. This gap is a few points narrower than it was in 1981.

Until 1996, Inuit communities improved slightly faster than non-Aboriginal communities and the CWB gap narrowed. Those reductions in the gap were largely undone when non-Aboriginal communities improved more than First Nations communities did between 2001 and 2006.

The widening of the CWB gap that occurred between 2001 and 2006 was partially driven by a jump in non-Aboriginal communities' high school completion rates. This jump should be interpreted with caution: the education questions on the census were changed in 2006, reducing the comparability of 2006 education data with data from previous censuses.

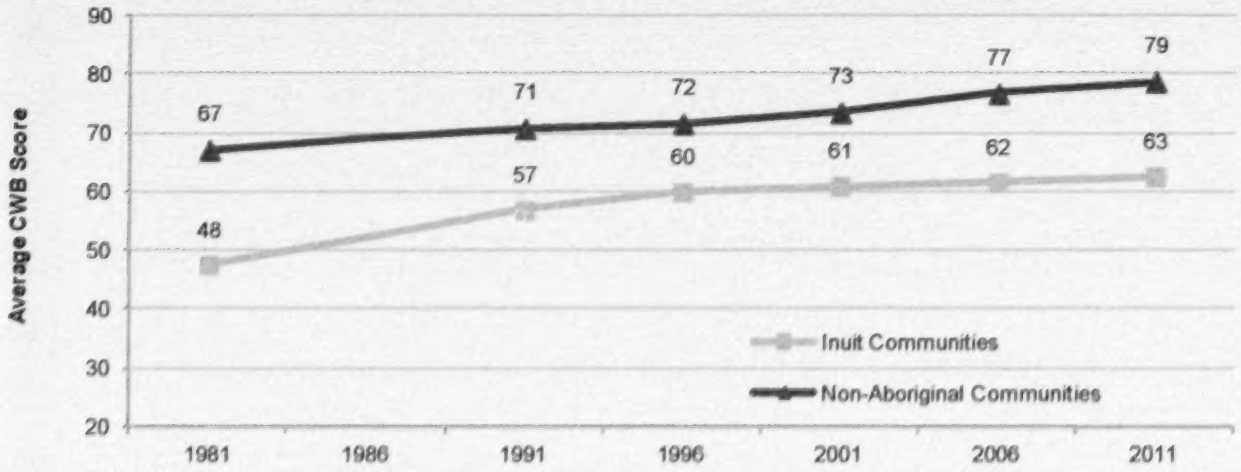
Nevertheless, the narrowing of the gap that was observed before 1996 did not resume after 2006: between 2006 and 2011, Inuit and non-Aboriginal communities improved at similar rates and the CWB gap was relatively stable.

The CWB Components

As noted above, the CWB is made up of four components: income, education, housing, and labour force activity. Each can range from a low of zero to a high of 100.

From largest to smallest, the component gaps between Inuit and non-Aboriginal communities are as follows: housing (29 points), education (20 points), labour force activity (8 points), and income (7 points).

Figure 1: Average CWB scores, Inuit and non-Aboriginal communities, 1981–2011

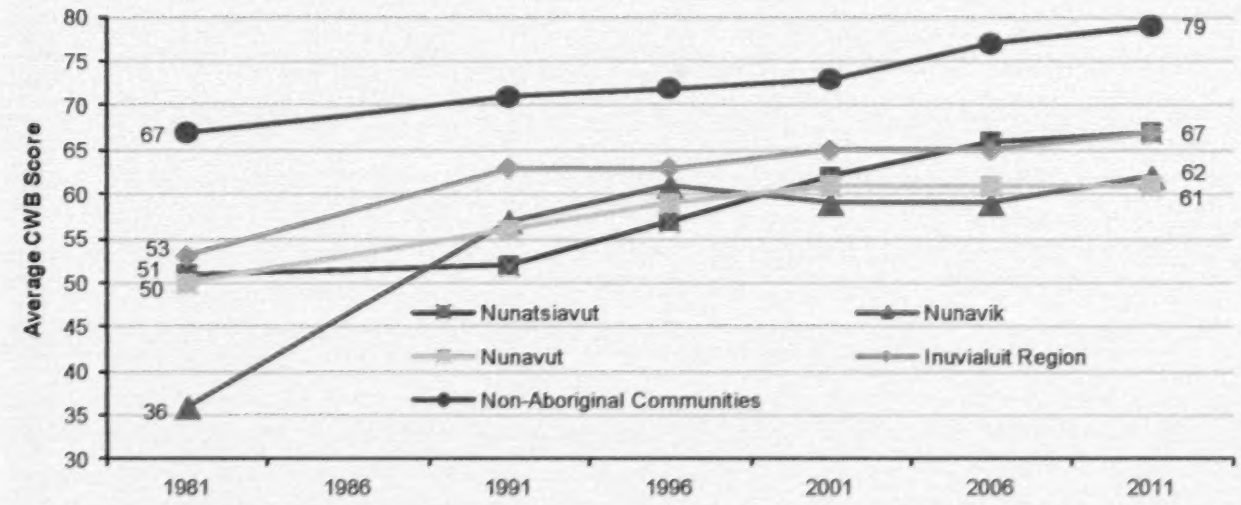


Source: Statistics Canada, Censuses of Population, 1981-2006, and National Household Survey, 2011

Each CWB component has undergone different changes over time:

1. Income: Since 1981, the average income score for Inuit communities has increased 29 points and the income gap relative to non-Aboriginal communities has narrowed by two-thirds. With only a seven-point gap remaining in 2011, Inuit communities will approach parity with non-Aboriginal communities by 2021, if current rates of increase persist.
2. Education: The average education score for Inuit communities also increased considerably between 1981 and 2011 (17 points). This increase was driven by greater high school completion rates. Increases in university completion were smaller. The education gap between Inuit communities and non-Aboriginal communities was quite stable until 2001, although it narrowed slightly between 1981 and 1991. Between 2001 and 2006, the gap widened as a result of a large jump in high school completion in non-Aboriginal communities. As mentioned above, this jump should be interpreted with caution. The gap widened again between 2006 and 2011. The average education score for non-Aboriginal communities increased, while Inuit communities' education score, for the first time since 1981, did not improve.

Figure 2: Average CWB scores by Region, Inuit and non-Aboriginal communities, 1981-2011



Source: Statistics Canada, Censuses of Population, 1981-2006, and National Household Survey, 2011

3. Housing: The average housing score for non-Aboriginal communities has been consistently high since 1981, reflecting generally strong housing conditions across the country. The average housing score for Inuit communities improved moderately in the 1980s and 1990s, but declined back to its 1991 level by 2011. Over the thirty year period between 1981 and 2011, the housing gap between Inuit and non-Aboriginal communities narrowed by a modest seven points. Until 2001, housing quantity (i.e., crowding) was improving. Conversely, housing quality (i.e., state of repair) declined between 1996 and 2006.
4. Labour Force Activity: Inuit communities' average labour force activity score increased slowly between 1981 and 1996. The relatively small labour force activity gap between Inuit and non-Aboriginal communities narrowed to only a few points between 1996 and 2001. These gains were largely lost in later years, however. Inuit communities' average labour force activity score was only four points higher in 2011 than it was in 1981 and the gap relative to non-Aboriginal communities remained at eight points. Inuit communities' average labour force participation score increased slowly until 2001. It declined slowly thereafter but was still twelve points higher in 2011 than in 1981. Inuit communities' average employment score lost a few points between 1981 and 2011.

Regional variations in CWB scores

Each of the four regions of Inuit Nunangat is under a different land claim or self-government agreement. All of their average CWB scores increased between 1981 and 2011 (Figure 2) but their specific trajectories differed.

Nunavut experienced relatively strong well-being improvements in the 1980s and 1990s before leveling off after 2001. Nunavik's average CWB score increased until 1996, stabilizing afterwards. Inuvialuit Region and Nunatsiavut increased fairly consistently across the 30-year period. In 1981, Nunavut, Nunatsiavut, and Inuvialuit Region had very similar CWB scores, while Nunavik lagged far behind. By 2011, Nunavik had caught up to Nunavut but both lagged several points behind Nunatsiavut and Inuvialuit Region.

Variations in CWB scores among communities

Average CWB scores provide only a partial picture of well-being in Inuit communities. CWB scores also vary considerably among individual Inuit communities. Some Inuit communities have very low well-being scores, while others are at or above the Canadian average (Figure 3).

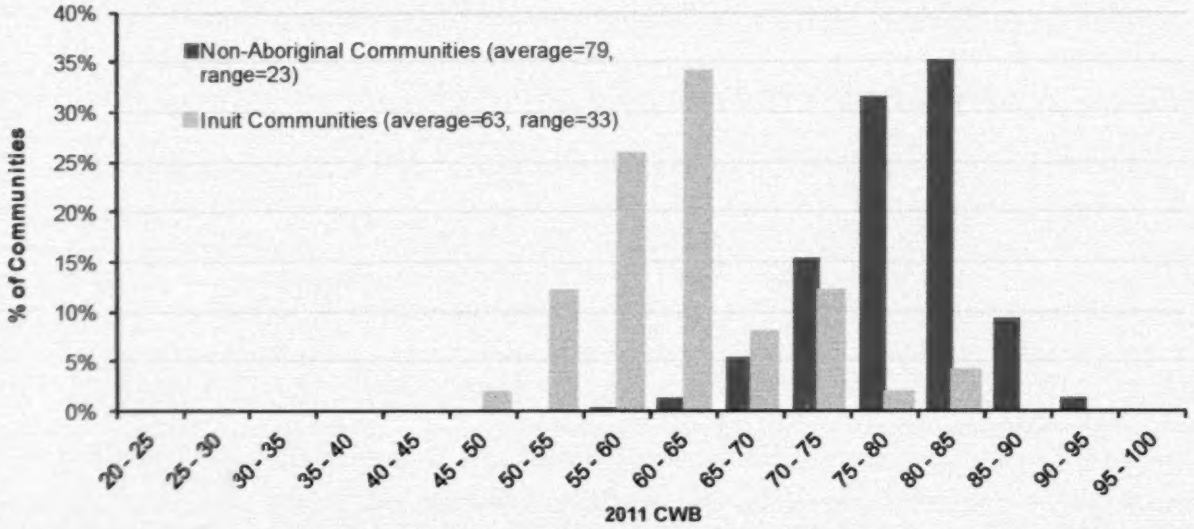
CWB scores actually vary more among Inuit communities than among non-Aboriginal communities. In 2011, 95% of non-Aboriginal communities' CWB scores fell in the 23-point range between 66 and 89, while 95% of Inuit communities' scores fell in the 33-point range between 49 and 82.

Conclusions

As measured by the CWB, well-being in Inuit communities continues to improve. The gap relative to non-Aboriginal communities has not narrowed much, however, and not at all in recent years. The increase in Inuit communities' average CWB score between 2006 and 2011 was driven by a large increase in their average income score.

The variability of CWB scores – both between regions and among individual communities – reinforces the importance of regional and community-specific approaches to policy and program development.

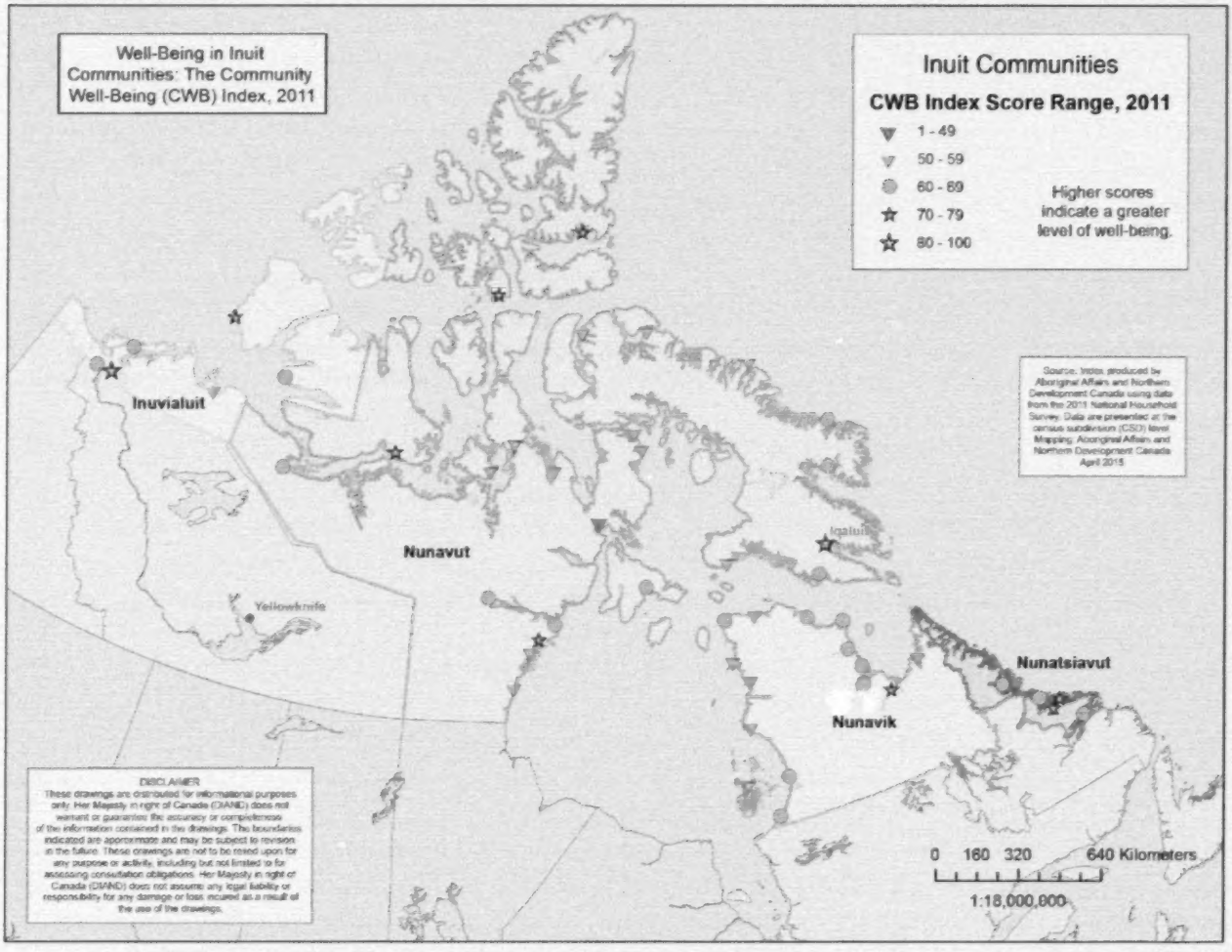
Figure 3: Distributions of CWB scores, Inuit, and non-Aboriginal communities, 2011



Source: Statistics Canada, National Household Survey, 2011

Methodological Details

CWB scores were calculated using data from the long form of the Census of Canada (1981–2006) and the National Household Survey (2011). The CWB emphasizes socio-economic aspects of well-being. Owing primarily to data limitations, the CWB does not include other elements of well-being such as health, culture, and the environment. CWB scores are available for most communities in Canada, which were classified as either First Nations communities, Inuit communities, or non-Aboriginal communities. Communities are defined in terms of census subdivisions, which comprise municipalities and areas equivalent to municipalities, such as Indian reserves. Some non-Aboriginal communities have substantial Aboriginal populations and some First Nations and Inuit communities have substantial non-Aboriginal populations. All community residents are included in the calculation of a CWB score. Where differences between CWB scores across time or between groups are reported, they are based on rounded scores. Differences based on unrounded scores could be slightly higher or lower.


Well-Being in Inuit Communities: The Community Well-Being (CWB) Index, 2011
Inuit Communities
CWB Index Score Range, 2011
1 - 49
50 - 59
60 - 69
70 - 79
80 - 100
Higher scores indicate a greater level of well-being.
Source: Index produced by Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development Canada using data from the 2011 National Household Survey. Data are presented at the census subdivision (CSD) level.
Mapping: Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development Canada
April 2015
Inuvialuit
Nunavut
Yellowknife
Inuvik
Nunatsiavut
Nunavik
DISCLAIMER
These drawings are distributed for informational purposes only. Her Majesty in right of Canada (DAND) does not warrant or guarantee the accuracy or completeness of the information contained in the drawings. The boundaries indicated are approximate and may be subject to revision in the future. These drawings are not to be relied upon for any purpose or activity, including but not limited to for assessing consultation obligations. Her Majesty in right of Canada (DAND) does not assume any legal liability or responsibility for any damage or loss incurred as a result of the use of the drawings.
0 160 320 640 Kilometers
1:18,000,000

Canada

For more information contact: research-recherche@aadnc-aandc.gc.ca

QS- Y393-000-EE-A1
Catalogue : R3-170/3-2014E-PDF
ISBN: 978-1-100-25130-1

Canada